

Cultural Heritage as Resource (elaboration by Andrew Gryf Paterson, 21.8.2015.v2)

Cultural heritage includes inherited artefacts, attributes and systems from a particular locale, group or society that are passed on from past generations, maintained through actions in the present, and given over for the benefit of future generations. However, what is considered valuable or heritage can change over time, compete with and have different meaning for different stakeholders.

There are three forms of heritage to consider here:

- Tangible Culture (buildings, monuments, landscapes, books, artifacts, art)
- Intangible Culture (folklore, traditional ways of doing, language, stories, knowledge)
- Natural heritage (ecosystem and biodiversity)

Inter-disciplinary art group SERDE's work and activity has been largely inspired by, and based upon these different aspects of cultural heritage noted above, and has included collaborations to explore human inter-relations with the local plant-environment and biodiversity. The following paragraphs give examples.

The site of SERDE's art and residency centre is one of the oldest wooden buildings in Aizpute, and has been restored since 2002 by SERDE as both practical and pedagogical work in traditional construction methods. This work alone was recently recognised as a significant contribution to regional tangible cultural heritage. One of the first material installations they made in the town in the early years was an outdoor kiln for firing ceramics, according local tradition. Since 2007 they have also hosted an iron-casting symposium gathering local and international sculptors and metal-workers. So, development of physical infrastructure and workshops for making artefacts and art objects – wood, metal, ceramic – have developed in hand with the practice and enabling traditions of making and doing, inviting younger and established artists and makers get involved.

Further, the ways of doing of local people and regional ethnic communities, including narratives of experiences have been documented in artist-led ethnographic expeditions and published in the *Tradīciju Burtnīca* (Exercise/Notebooks of Traditions) publication series. To give examples of maker and project developments, the earliest publication *Brandava gatavošana Viduskurzemē* [Moonshine/vodka making in Central Kurzeme] and related public demonstrations led towards a national innovation award in intangible cultural heritage in 2007. This work inspired a practice-led investigation into micro-brewing with local producers (*Alus gatavošana* [Beer brewing], 2009), and the development of new workshop facilities, and hosting gatherings of regional micro-brewers. Another publication, *Vācēju kultūra Viduskurzemē* / Foraging in Central Kurzeme (2010), documented the use of local plants and fungi in the region, a reflection of the human value of the biodiversity in the region still appreciated by some residents. This led to the ongoing artistic-research project *1 Ha Aronia Melanocarpa Power Plantation* (2011-) by Bartaku, in collaboration with SERDE, which harvested Aronia berries and processed them into liquids (wine, beer, syrup) and foods (candy, jam) according to traditional and experimental methods or recipes; but has also inspired an experimental musical overture presented in Riga Capital of Culture 2014 programme.

These processes encourage the idea that cultural heritage can be not only an inspiration, but a source of both tangible and intangible material, as well as a knowledge-resource for artistic works or artist-led or grassroots investigations. Artists, craftpersons, makers, and cultural workers can contribute in the innovative re-valuing of cultural heritage, by developing alternative or new ways of developing, sharing and communicating heritage, including new formats such as participatory and informal or recreational learning workshops. In doing so, it nourishes collaboration between artists, cultural associations with other researchers, professionals, small-scale entrepreneurs, as well as ennobles local residents and citizens who hold and maintain traditional knowledge and ways of doing.

Resources are understood here in these given examples as materials, services, skills, energy, talent, ability, knowledge or other assets, which are utilized to support and produce benefit, not only to individuals and associations, but larger communities such as municipalities, regions or wider groups of people.

With this background in mind, the 'Cultural Heritage as Resource' event from September 10-13th at SERDE gathers together persons from various disciplines - arts, design, science, heritage - to share and explore practice and methods. It has long been said that culture is developed from some abundance or surplus in the society or environment. Coincidentally, the occasion of gathering also takes place at the time of the annually-hosted *Āboļošana* (AppleThink) public event since 2012, where SERDE's residency artists and guests mix with local producers and craft-persons who share their products, both apple-based and otherwise. Apples (and Aronia berries) are an abundant local resource at this time of year and has some associated traditions and ways of processing and conserving. The gathering takes place in the context of the HIAP-led 'Frontiers in Retreat' programme, which promotes the "necessity of multi-disciplinary approaches to the current ecological concerns and aims to develop means and platforms for this through methods of contemporary art".

A wider interpretation of cultural heritage as resource, going beyond the tangible and intangible, takes into consideration natural heritage (ecosystems and biodiversity) which includes Biotic (living things that make up an ecosystem) and Abiotic (non-living factors, eg. water, light, radiation, temperature, humidity, atmosphere, soil, stone) aspects. The inter-relationships and -dependences of these resources is also the conditions of life that we inherited from those who have come before us, that we maintain (or not), and that we pass on to those who will follow us in the future.

Resources can be classified as Renewable (replenishing) or alternatively Non-renewable (finite, depleting, loss-y), but are often defined only from the perspective of whether they renew themselves in a time-spans meaningful to humans, rather than to non-humans. Infact this human-centric perspective can lead to selfish and negative behaviours which are criticised as 'resource-hungry' or 'resource-grabbing', creating resource shortages. There may be actual and potential resources existing at different times, and as well as those that have been displaced from one ecosystem, culture or community for various reasons.

Cultural heritage focuses our attention on the care and concern for the material and immaterial things that humans share in our environment, and the passing on of life-ways. It is sensitive to the sustainability of cultures and practices of value over longer durations of time. Conservation and stewardship provide ethics of responsible planning and management of resources, accepting or assigning responsibility to shepherd and safeguard the valuables of others. There is what Simon Thurley describes as a Heritage Cycle (2005), which gives an indication of how we can make the past part of our future: "By understanding (cultural heritage), people value it; By valuing it, people want to care for it; By caring for it, it will help people enjoy it; From enjoying it, comes a thirst to understand; By understanding it.." and so it goes round.

Artists, makers, cultural producers and interdisciplinary practitioners or researchers can learn from this due attention and cyclical care and concern, imagining where to enter the cycle. Likewise the cultural heritage field can learn from the intuitive, critical and experimental ways of investigating, communicating and presenting cultural heritage. Together we can consider an expanded notion of resources to include the biotic and abiotic environments that we live within as inter-related and inter-dependent with our tangible and intangible cultural heritage. All are under affected by an age of crises: ecological in the case of climate change or breakdown, but also the social and economic disruptions and displacements that create, repair and accompany it.

Reference

Simon Thurley, Into the future. Our strategy for 2005-2010. In: *Conservation Bulletin* [English Heritage], 2005 (49).